

VZCZCXRO7056
RR RUEHAST
DE RUEHTL #0867 2651106
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 221106Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY TALLINN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9049
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS TALLINN 000867

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EN](#)

SUBJECT: ESTONIA: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - TEMPEST IN A
TEAPOT

Ref: A) Tallinn 00756 B) Tallinn 582

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The second round of voting in Estonia's presidential elections will take place on September 23rd, when members of the electoral college meet in Tallinn. Although polls indicate popular support favors Social Democrat Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the contest in the electoral college between incumbent Arnold Ruutel and Ilves is likely to be extremely close. The outcome of this election will determine how much of a role Estonia's president will play in foreign policy for the next five years: minimal if Ruutel wins; activist with Ilves. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Public interest in the election has been very strong. 43,000 people called in on September 20 to "vote" for president in a poll taken during a televised debate among party leaders. The outcome of this poll, which tracks with other recent surveys, indicated approximately 70% of respondents favor Ilves over Ruutel. Although representatives of local government councils (who make up more than two thirds of the electoral college) are more directly tied to their constituencies than MPs, popular support will not necessarily equate to victory in the electoral college. Adding to the uncertainty, parties do not have the ability to maintain the same level of discipline among local officials as they did with MPs in the first round, where Center and People's Union ordered their deputies not to vote rather than face the possibility that some might use their secret ballot to vote against the party line.

¶3. (U) Not surprisingly, parties on both sides have asserted they have enough votes to elect their candidate. Media predictions, however, have ranged widely. Of note, a telephone survey of local electors conducted by Estonian Radio on September 19 concluded that Ilves may be three votes short of winning, Ruutel ¶14. However, 16 members would not reveal the way they intend to vote.

¶4. (SBU) There is a small chance that neither candidate will obtain enough votes to win; a simple majority of votes cast is required. There has been speculation in the press that some electors will cast empty or spoiled ballots. If enough electors do this and the votes that are cast are relatively evenly split, both Ilves and Ruutel could fall short. Failure to choose a president this round would result in the elections moving back to Parliament for a third round of voting.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Two things about this election are clear. If President Ruutel wins re-election, he will continue the same relatively inactive approach he has taken the last five years. Ilves, on the other hand, would certainly seek to play a much more activist role

as President, particularly in foreign policy. (ref B).

WOS